

AMERICAN WOOD-ENGRAVERS

Author(s): JAMES B. CARRINGTON

Source: *The American Magazine of Art*, Vol. 18, No. 8 (AUGUST, 1927), pp. 414-423

Published by: The Frick Collection

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23930152>

Accessed: 28-07-2016 14:39 UTC

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at
<http://about.jstor.org/terms>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



The Frick Collection is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *The American Magazine of Art*



Courtesy of Harper and Brothers. Copyright

"GIRL AND PEONIES"—A PAINTING BY IRVING R. WILES—ENGRAVED BY HENRY WOLF

AMERICAN WOOD-ENGRAVERS

BY JAMES B. CARRINGTON

THE REVIVAL of the art of wood-engraving began in England in the workshop of Thomas Bewick, 1753-1828, and he is justly called the father of the true art of engraving on wood. In the early days of the art, the engraver was little more than a mechanic who was restricted to following the work of the designer line for line. Freedom for the engraver and an opportunity to use his own artistic sense came through the invention of the white line by Bewick. By the old method the block was looked upon as a white surface upon which the design was drawn. Grays and blacks were obtained by increasing the number of cross-strokes as in drawing on paper.

By the white line method, color is obtained by increasing the number of white lines, the surface being treated as a black surface. The engraver himself draws with his graver. He must be an artist, not a mere mechanic, and bring to his work the initiative and invention of the interpreter.

Bewick was the first to use boxwood in place of the pear or other soft woods of the earlier men, and he engraved across the grain. He is also said to have invented the burin that took the place of knives in cutting.

Bewick's fame was established by his engravings for his own books on *British Quadrupeds* and the *British Birds*, published in 1790 and 1797. Many of the illustrations, however, were designed and engraved by his pupils.

It was a common practice then, as later, to have a large block engraved by several men. Bewick's pupils, Nesbit and Clennell, showed fine artistic feeling, and Robert Branston, self-taught like Bewick, engraved some remarkable blocks in the manner of copper-plate engraving, an art he had practiced successfully before he took up wood.

The story of English wood-engraving may be followed in the English illustrated magazines and books. There is an admirable book on the subject, "English Illustration in the Sixties;" 1855-1870, with examples of work by such famous artists as Burne-Jones, Walter Crane, Du Maurier, Fildes, Birket Foster, Sir John Gilbert, A. Boyd Houghton, Lord Leighton, Charles Keene,

Sir John Millais, W. Holman Hunt, M. J. Lawless, Frederick Sandys, Frederick Walker, Whistler and others known to fame in the great days of English illustration.

Wood-engraving in America began in 1804 with Dr. Alexander Anderson, a physician of artistic tastes—an earlier Dr. Yale—who is still remembered by many collectors for his charming etchings.

Dr. Anderson's work covered a wide variety of subjects, including advertising, business cards, ballads, children's books, etc.

In 1843, Harpers published their famous illustrated Bible with sixteen hundred cuts done under the supervision of Joseph Alexander Adams, a friend of Dr. Anderson.

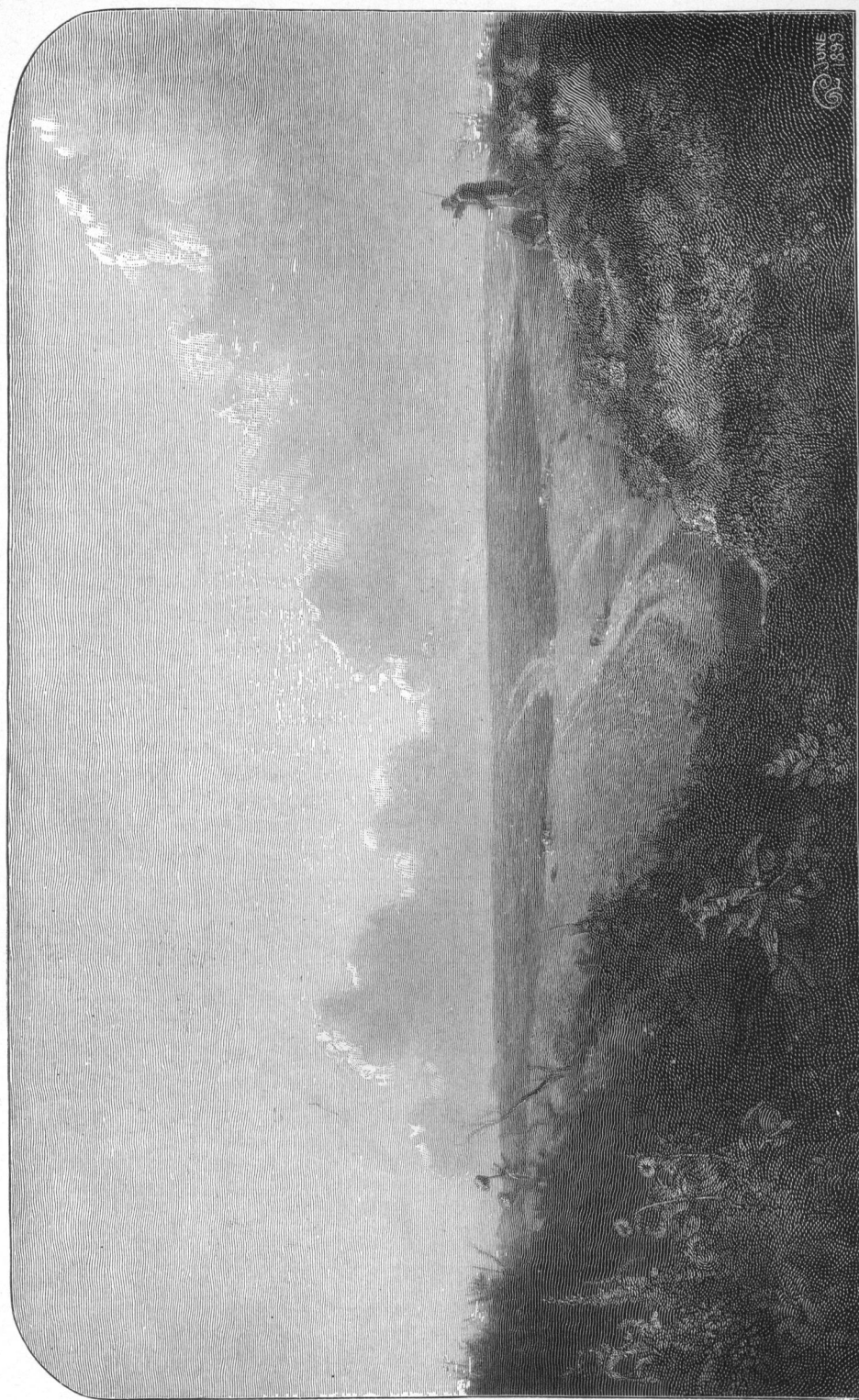
The American Tract Society employed many engravers to illustrate books and pamphlets and did a great service in developing and encouraging the art. A notable book, Harris' "Insects Injurious to Vegetation," published in 1862, contained a series of remarkable and beautiful engravings by Henry Marsh.

Two men of the sixties who had a great influence on American wood-engraving were A. V. S. Anthony and W. J. Linton, the latter an Englishman who had established a fine reputation in his own country.

Mr. Anthony was for many years responsible for the art work of the noted publishing firm of James R. Osgood, of Boston, one of their leading publications being the quarto edition of the works of Longfellow.

Linton was a fine engraver of the old school who believed in the tradition that wood-engraving was purely a line process and that the ways of the new tonal school in America were all wrong. He attacked the work of Cole and Juengling and others with considerable acerbity and got himself disliked good and plenty.

Linton wrote a "History of American Wood-engraving" that was published in 1882 in which his theories and criticisms were made clear. His ire was especially stirred by Cole's work and by some remarkable illustrations drawn by James E. Kelly, who later turned to sculpture, that were engraved by Juengling. Kelly's drawings were full of jazz, had an apparent spon-



Courtesy of the Century Company. Copyright
"HOUSEHOLD HEATH"—A PAINTING BY JOHN CROME—ENGRAVED BY TIMOTHY COLE

taneity, dash and vigor quite out of the ordinary, and Juengling lost none of their quality in his engraving. You may see these in the old *Scribner's Monthly* for 1877.

Dr. Weitenkamp, in his valuable book on "The American Graphic Arts," says that it has been contended that J. G. Smithwick's engraving of Reinhart's "Drumming out a Tory" in *Harper's Weekly* for February 3, 1877, was the first engraving showing the new method.

What did the new method signify? It meant that the American engravers had declared their right to produce facsimiles of originals and by any technical means that seemed to them appropriate and effective.

Just to make it clear to some who may not know anything about the technique of wood-engraving, we are going to quote some words by one of the greatest masters of the art, whose engravings after the old masters, that appeared in the *Century Magazine* for so many years, are among the treasured prints of every collector.

The quotation is from an article by Mr. Timothy Cole that appeared in the *Century*, illustrated with some of his beautiful work.

"Any account of engraving leads us naturally to the consideration of lines, cross-hatching, and stipples. These are the three elements constituting its technique. By combining and elaborating these, bringing together coarse and fine, thick and thin, rough and smooth, equal and unequal, and further by bringing a smooth tint in conjunction with a rough one as in a beautiful face upon a stippled or hatched background, or by setting off a bold brilliant treatment by a close opaque one, thereby enhancing the qualities in each, the engraver is enabled to create a pleasing and expressive variety in the surface of his block.

"The excellence of a beautiful engraving is primarily in the employment of these resources, stipple, lines and cross-hatchings with their juxtapositions."

It was about 1870 that the new American school really began to attract special attention. That was the year when the old *Scribner's Monthly* was started, and with the advent of this magazine began the work of a man to whom wood-engraving owes an everlasting debt. Alexander Drake, the art editor, himself an engraver, kept up his good work for many years with the *Century Maga-*

zine, and to him we owe not only the wonderful blocks of Timothy Cole but many others that have become a part of the story of American wood-engraving at its best.

Let us not forget to mention in this connection the splendid aid that was given by George Howes Whittle, Mr. Drake's associate in the art department of the *Century*.

The eighties began the great years of the art, but the magazines continued to adorn their pages with beautiful work long after that, and Cole won gold medals at the exposition in Chicago in 1892, Paris, 1900, Buffalo, 1901, St. Louis, 1904.

Wolf was awarded a gold medal at the Salon of 1895, and silver medals at Paris in 1900.

Many of the leading men were identified with the Society of American Wood-engravers founded by Juengling and Kruell, which issued a notable collection of prints published by the Harpers in 1887: "Engravings on Wood by Members of the Society of American Wood-engravers With An Introduction By William M. Laffan."

There were examples by Caroline A. Powell, John P. Davis, John Tinkey, Thomas Johnson, F. S. King, Henry Wolf, F. H. Wellington, R. A. Muller, S. G. Putnam, Frank French, W. B. Closson, Elbridge Kingsley, T. Cole, G. Kruell, Victor Bernstrom.

The society won diplomas at the International Exhibition of Art in Berlin, 1891; at the Exhibition in Vienna, 1895; at Chicago, 1893.

Individual prizes were awarded to Elbridge Kingsley, Closson, J. P. Davis, W. M. Aikman, S. G. Putnam, Kruell, Wolf, and Henry Davidson.

A Portfolio of Proof Impressions selected from *Scribner's Monthly* and *St. Nicholas* was published in 1879, and other series followed.

In 1894 Charles Scribner's Sons issued a portfolio of Forty Proofs by various engravers, under my supervision, with a foreword on "The Art of the American Wood-engraver" by Philip Gilbert Hamerton.

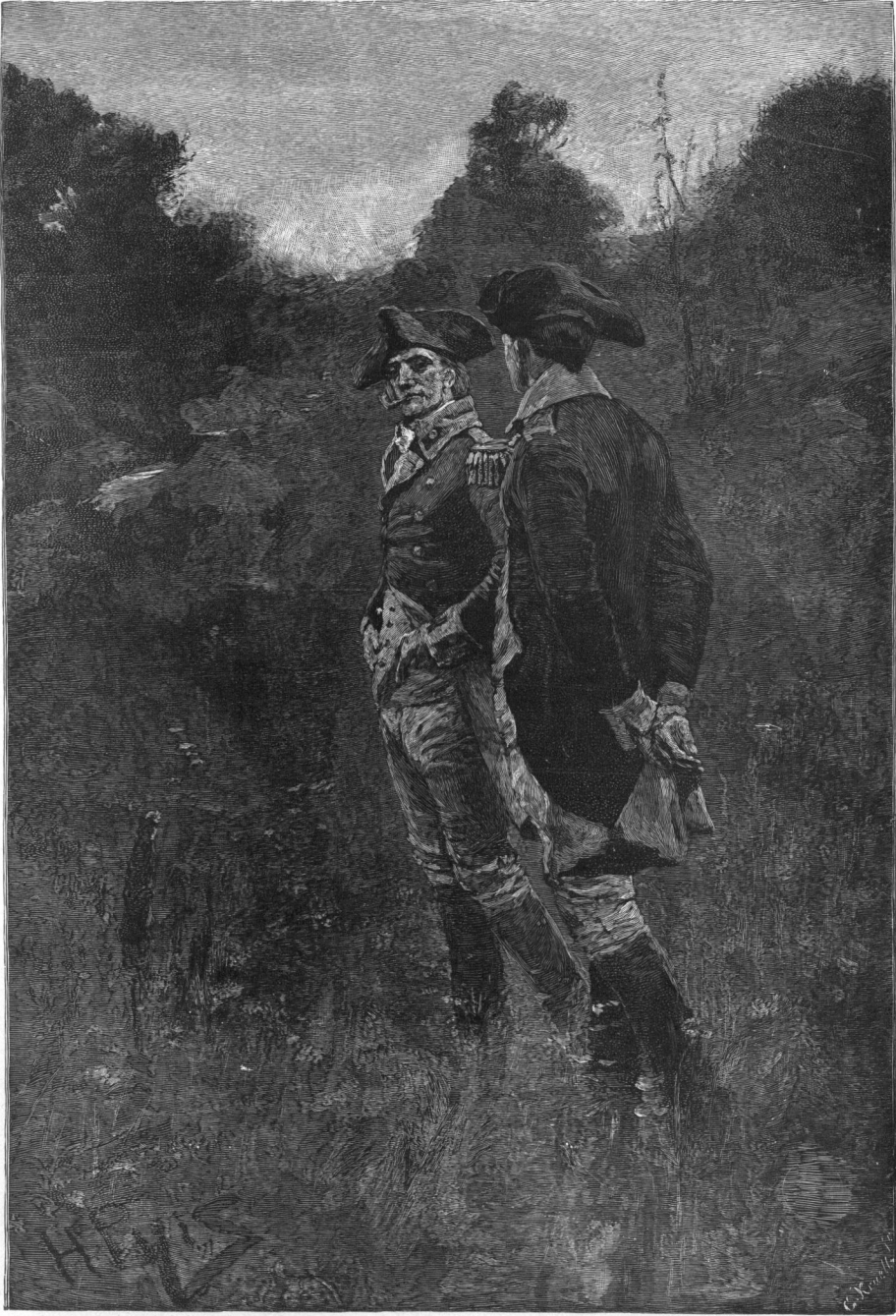
It was my privilege to contribute to the little volume, accompanying the prints, the biographical sketches of the engravers and a bibliography of the art.

The men represented were Walter M. Aikman, George T. Andrew, C. Irving Butler, Charles W. Chadwick, William B. Closson,



Courtesy of Scribner's Magazine. Copyright

ILLUSTRATION BY HOWARD PYLE FOR HAROLD FREDERICK'S STORY, "IN THE VALLEY"—ENGRAVED BY G. KRUELL



Courtesy of Scribner's Magazine. Copyright

**ILLUSTRATION BY HOWARD PYLE FOR HAROLD FREDERICK'S STORY, "IN THE VALLEY."
ENGRAVED BY G. KRUELL**



Courtesy of Harper and Brothers. Copyright

PORTRAIT OF A LADY—A PAINTING BY VELASQUEZ—ENGRAVED BY HENRY WOLF

Edward H. Del'Orme, George H. Del Orme, Francis E. Fillebrown, Frank French, Thomas H. Heard, Thomas Johnson, Frederick Juengling, Frank S. King, Elbridge Kingsley, Gustav Kruell, Henry W. Peckwell, Frederick A. Petit, Stephen G. Putnam, George A. Teel, Richard G. Tietze, Isaac M. Van Ness, Robert Varley, William B. Witte, Henry Wolf.

This is a list of representative engravers, but let us add to them some others whose names should be inscribed on the roll of honor: E. Clement, Henry Davidson, John P. Davis, Anna Botsford Comstock, Caroline Powell, John W. Evans, Ernest Heineman, Albert M. Lindsay, Charles J. A. State, H. E. Silvester, Victor Bernstrom, T. H. Wellington, William Miller, T. Schussler, H. Veltin, J. H. E. Whitney, Richard S. Miller, Robert C. Collins, A. E. Anderson, Stafford M. Northcote.

In the presentation of their work under Mr. Drake's supervision, the engravers were fortunate in having such a master printer as Mr. Theodore DeVinne to see that the presses did justice to the blocks. No one ever better understood the use of overlays and underlays or gave more patient study to the right papers and printing inks to insure the very best results.

Valuable articles by Mr. DeVinne on "The Growth of Wood-cut Printing" appeared in the old *Scribner's Monthly* in April and May, 1880.

With the beginning of the new *Scribner's Magazine* in 1887, the wood-engravers were offered another understanding and sympathetic medium, and as I look back, at times, over the old volumes, I rejoice in the splendid examples of their work that adorn so many pages of the magazine, with which it was my privilege and good fortune to spend so many happy years.

What a beautiful art the old wood engraving was; how full of vitality, brilliancy, inspiration, skill. What patient toil a block represented; what a lot of artistic enthusiasm must have been needed to permit the engraver to sit day after day at his bench, his eye glued to a magnifying glass, slowly digging out of the insensate box-wood such masterpieces as are represented in Mr. Coles' series after famous old masters: Mr. Closson's "Winifred Dysart" after George Fuller and his own lovely studies from

nature, Kingsley's interpretations of men of the Barbizon school and also his own engravings direct from nature, Mr. French's masterly blocks after various painters—Wolf's, and Peckwell's engravings of work by Howard Pyle, lovely blocks also by Peckwell after Albert Moore, Morelli, Burne-Jones, W. L. Taylor and others. Many names come to mind that dwell in my memory by reason of their exquisite art.

What wood-engraving meant to the engravers is well expressed in the following quotations from some of the leaders.

Mr. A. S. V. Anthony said:

"Given the work of the artist, the engraver's first duty is to reproduce it without any change whatever. If the reproduction is worth doing at all, it is worth doing well. I think that Mr. Linton is the best engraver that ever lived. His theories are absolutely sound and absolutely right. The best result is obtained by the pure graver line, yet any result is allowable if faithful to the original. My theories, so far as I have any, are for the simple direct line rather than for the involved style."

An interesting point dwelt upon by Mr. Anthony was the question of the use of the photograph on the block instead of the drawing that had so long been the only way.

"Which is the better to engrave from, a photograph on the block or a drawing? I, most decidedly, prefer the drawing.

"There are plenty of painters who can draw well on the wood. Shirlaw, Colman, Smillie, Whittredge, Hart, McEntee, draw beautifully on the wood, and everybody knows what Abbey and Rinehart have done."

But the photographing of the original on the block opened the way for the reproduction of hundreds of paintings and illustrations by new men. It did not matter what was the size of the original; the camera brought it down to the required size. This made a tremendous difference in the quality and variety of magazine illustration and greatly added to the amount of work offered the engraver.

Of the functions of the wood-engraver Mr. Cole said:

"The function of wood-engraving is faithfully to reproduce the artist's work in pure lines. The present little flurry among the engravers is due to the fact that some of



Courtesy of the Century Company. Copyright

PORTRAIT OF MRS. CARNAC BY SIR JOSHUA REYNOLDS—ENGRAVED BY TIMOTHY COLE

them have been experimenting recently in more or less novel ways.

"I have experimented with the rest of them and I have learned to know the value of a pure line. There is something beautiful in a natural line that the hand makes in drawing, and it seems to me that the en-

graver should try to work in the free manner that an artist would with his pencil."

When this was written Linton was doing his knocking.

Of him Mr. Cole wrote: "Mr. Linton has done a great deal for wood-engraving. Of course, like the rest of us, he has made a good

many errors. But I wouldn't take the liberty he does with an artist's design. If the artist is a first-class one, it is not to be supposed that the engraver can be first class and at the same time a better artist than the first-class one."

In the following words Mr. John P. Davis summarized just what the new school represented. "Instead of merely symbolizing the work of the artist, the engraver now makes use of all methods by which he can fix on the block, as accurately and perfectly as possible, the original picture that has been put in his hands for reproduction. This abandonment of the conventional recipes, this enlarged liberty with respect to means, is the distinguishing characteristic of the new school. Exactly to reproduce—that is the present aim of the engraver on wood."

Juengling, one of the innovators, said, "I claim that there is nothing that cannot be engraved—that is to say, exactly reproduced on wood." How well he lived up to his opinion was shown in his wonderful work.

"Bewick and Branston could not have dreamed of the purposes with which the artistic engraver is now imbued."

He pays his respects to Linton: "His comment on modern artistic engravers is full of gross and unpardonable errors."

Ricard A. Muller said: "The wood-engraver will never do the finest work until he is as good a draughtsman as the artist whom he is copying—until he can take his pencil and draw from life. He must be a hard student of painting and drawing. His business is to reproduce a picture as well as the looking-glass does. The beauty of a wood-engraving does not consist in the beauty of its lines; lines have nothing to do with it at all; any kind of line is allowable that is not crazy, and has a certain symmetry, and will unite one tint with another."

Mr. Tinkey said: "The new school claims the right to engrave the lines in any direction it chooses in order to produce the required effects. Do you notice a softness about the clouds in that sky? We get this effect by cutting the black lines in one direction, and crossing them with white lines in another.

"Linton does not believe in white lines so used. But I defy him or anybody else to produce that result without them. The softness of those lights could not be secured in any other way."

Henry Wolf said: "The aim of the engraver ought to be to render as faithfully as possible the drawing that has been given him, whether in ink, in pencil, in crayon, in charcoal, or in guache. So faithfully should this be done that the spectator will see in the engraving, not the engraver, but the original artist after whose work the engraving has been made. Mr. Linton's engravings always suggest Mr. Linton. They do not remind you of the original artist."

The old school of tonal wood-engraving, of facsimile reproduction of the artist's work, has passed. One of the younger practitioners who carried on the best traditions was W. G. Watt, whose recent untimely death was deeply regretted. He was not identified with the magazines as were most of the men we have mentioned, but devoted his time chiefly to the engraving of special subjects chosen by himself, or to cutting his own drawings on the wood. He was modest and retiring, an artist to the last fibre, and his beautiful proofs will be in demand with those of his more famous peers.

Wood-engraving is by no means a dead art, however. There are indications of a revival along new ways that promise much in individuality, boldness of line and distinction. In the work of Ruzicka, Howard McCormick, Harry Townsend, Murphy, Lankes, Hopson, Lewis and other younger men, we have reason for congratulation.

It was to the camera that the wood-engraver owed his greatest opportunity, and, alas, it was to the camera that he owed his downfall—the camera supplemented by the half-tone screen that made possible the rapid making of cheap relief plates that could be printed with type.

Go back and look over the bound volumes of the old *Harper's*, *Scribner's Monthly*, later the *Century*, the new *Scribner's*, *Harper's* and *Leslie's Weekly*, *Picturesque America* 72-74 and the books of the eighties and nineties and compare both the illustrations and the reproduction with those of today.

As time goes on, prints by our American wood-engravers will have the value of choice etchings or lithographs; they will be the pride of collectors.

Happily we have fine collections of proofs for reference in the New York Public Library, the Boston Museum, Library of Congress and elsewhere.